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Approved For Release 2000/08/03 : CIA-RDP75-00149R0006004

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Meany Keeps His Cool Over Reuther

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MIAMI BEACH, Fla., Feb. 21 — George Meany is willing to fight with Walter Reuther, but only if Mr. Reuther goes thru proper channels first.

Until then, Mr. Meany, president of the AFL-CIO, isn't going to dignify Mr. Reuther's recent complaints and charges that the Federation is complacent, ineffective and dictatorially run.

That is Mr. Meany's position, expressed yesterday as the top command of the AFL-CIO, from which Mr. Reuther resigned three weeks ago, met here. By keeping the lid on a potentially explosive situation, Mr. Meany has made peace possible at some future date.

NEXT MOVE

The next move is Mr. Reuther's. Two courses are open to him, as observers here see things. He could continue the war of words against Mr. Meany's leadership, ultimately splitting his huge United Auto Workers away from the Federation. Or he could accept Mr. Meany's challenge to battle out the issues in terms of existing AFL-CIO channels and machinery.

In a sense this was the olive branch Mr. Meany offered him:

"Come on back into the house of labor, Walter, bring up your grievances at a future council meeting, or at some other meeting, or at a convention or special convention of the whole AFL-CIO. If you don't do it that way, you'll never get a hearing."

Thus, those who came here expecting a further heightening of what has been billed as the great Meany-Reuther war, found that while there may be a disagreement, there is, for the moment, only one combatant — Mr. Reuther.

1 MAN OUTLET

In a sense Mr. Meany's mastery of the situation tended to confirm Mr. Reuther's complaint that the AFL-CIO is a one-man organization. Mr. Meany completely dominated the council session. His proposal that Mr. Reuther's resignation be accepted was adopted unanimously after only six or seven minutes of discussion.

The other council members accepted without debate Mr. Meany's contention that no argument existed officially because Mr. Reuther had not submitted a bill of particulars thru channels. Rather the grievances were in a letter to UAW members from Mr. Reuther and other Auto Union leaders. Mr. Meany received only a copy of the letter.

Mr. Meany, calm, reticent and reasonable, did nothing to escalate the disagreement. He denied all knowledge of a "feud" with Mr. Reuther, said he had enjoyed only "the nicest relationship" with him for the last five years except for one incident last summer, and pleaded ignorance of any peacemaking efforts by other labor leaders.

NO MEDIATOR

I. W. Abel, president of the Steelworkers Union, who reportedly has been acting as a mediator between the two men, denied he had performed in that

capacity, although he said he hoped Mr. Reuther would not pull his UAW out of the Federation. Mr. Abel said he would "do anything" he could to keep that from happening.

Mr. Reuther's seat will be filled later this week. Mr. Meany has named a committee to select a replacement, who probably will come from the CIO side of the merged organization. But should Mr. Reuther change his mind and decide to accept Mr. Meany's challenge to debate the issues within the AFL-CIO, he could take over the council seat to be vacated next week when George Burdon, defeated president of the United Rubber Workers, will resign.

Mr. Meany was equally uncommunicative about recent reports that two AFL-CIO affiliates — the Retail Clerks and the Newspaper Guild — had received CIA funds. He withheld

specific comment until he knows more, but said in principle he opposes unions receiving such money.

"I have an ingrained opposition to spy activities," he said. "I realize the CIA has a job to do but I think it should do it without involving the labor movement."

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